

I agree completely with the FISTS petition.

Examination of the licensing figures as reported by the FCC shows that the vast majority of people getting new licenses since April 2000 have passed Element 1A and obtained HF privileges. The 5 wpm Morse code test is not a barrier to anyone who is not physically handicapped and who can pass Elements 2 and 3.

Furthermore, Morse code is a unique aspect of the amateur radio service. Interest in Morse is at an all-time high, with QRP CW operation being the fastest-growing segment of the hobby. There is a plethora of inexpensive kits that are easy to build, and the skills acquired by these hobbyists as they complete and operate their tiny CW transceivers will serve them well if called upon to assist the community during a national disaster or homeland security emergency.

The FISTS petition is well-considered, and unlike many other petitions that have been submitted on whether to keep the Morse requirement, clearly has the interests of the greater amateur radio community in mind. But I believe there is another reason to keep Morse code testing beyond its utilitarian aspects; Element 1A is the only test where one cannot mindlessly memorize the answers and pass the test. Understanding Morse code well enough to pass the 5 wpm test is a demonstration that the applicant values HF operating privileges enough to commit several hours of effort over a several-week period. As someone who made this effort (and honestly it doesn't take much effort to pass Element 1A), I have to wonder about the people who complain about this requirement and, because they think Morse is outdated (it isn't) stubbornly refuse to study for and pass the code requirement. Do we really want people who, rather than meet the requirements or follow the rules, want the rules to be changed to meet THEIR expectations? Isn't this what has killed the Citizens Band for useful utility communications?

That is why I support the FISTS proposal. It lets Technicians onto HF, albeit in a limited way, to work CW and other HF narrow-band digital modes. I believe this is good, because even if a Tech licensee uses software to decode CW, just being exposed to it through QSOs will teach him enough CW to pass the 5 wpm test in less than a year. Current licensees with HF privileges are protected from inadvertant interference because these new and inexperienced operators are confined to the Novice subbands. More spectrum will be fully utilized, which is good for everyone. And, we keep the incentive of fuller HF access to those Technicians who are motivated to learn CW at the 5 wpm level (or who pick it up through constant exposure). A win-win situation.

In summary, I fully support the FISTS petition, and urge the commission to give it their strongest recommendation.